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Patrick R. Donahoe
Postmaster General
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I write with strong objection to the United States Postal Service (USPS) handling of the public comment period and community outreach notification for the City of Lackawanna postal facility. According to the Proposal to Close the Lackawanna Branch, your very own documentation, "On or about September 4, 2011, questionnaires were distributed to delivery customers of the Lackawanna Branch." As of this date, I am not aware of one survey having been delivered to a single Lackawanna street address.

In addition to the complete lack of a community meeting notice and questionnaire distribution, the posting of the community meeting in the Lackawanna Post Office itself is printed in 8 point font, high above eye level and doesn't include the meeting time. This is no way to provide information to the customers who frequent the facility and even more troublesome given the above average senior population living in Lackawanna.

In response to these egregious missteps, last Friday representatives of the USPS responded to my attached correspondence requesting more time for public input by agreeing to postpone the community meeting scheduled for September 20 to ensure the right of the people of Lackawanna to present their concerns to the USPS were recognized, respected and on the record. After being informed by the Post Office that the meeting would be postponed until due notification was observed, the USPS retracted their offer and decided to go ahead with their planned community meeting. This unilateral change throws into serious doubt the willingness of the USPS to address any of the community's concerns moving forward in this process. I was both shocked and disturbed by the confusing and chaotic communication with my office and further troubled by the USPS decision to have this process move forward quickly rather than in pragmatic and judicious way.

As we understand from discussions with USPS officials, the clock is ticking on the Lackawanna Post Office closing. The timeline we have from the Post Office indicates a final decision will be made before 110 days and the site would close within 138 days. We are currently at about day 56 in the process, at the halfway point of a final decision, and still frustratingly waiting for due diligence from the USPS to adequately inform and allow for public comment on the fate you seek for this location.

In 2009, the backroom operations of the Lackawanna postal facility were closed and relocated inuring considerable savings to the USPS. In 2011, the residents of Lackawanna are asked to sacrifice once again with this proposed closing.

As per my letter dated August 9, 2011, I remain opposed to the proposal to close the only USPS facility in the City of Lackawanna based on the unique demographics and needs of the surrounding community including: a significant veteran population, 33% of households include a person 65 years of age or older, 27.5% of households include a person with a disability and 23.8% of households do not have access to a car. In addition to the Lackawanna Post Office serving a unique, diverse population highly dependent on the facility's close proximity to surrounding neighborhoods, it is located in the core of the central business district which is also home to the Our Lady of Victory (OLV) Basilica and National Shrine. Founded by Father Nelson H. Baker, the Basilica of Our Lady of Victory is a significant pilgrimage and visitor destination as Father Baker's journey to sainthood remains under review by the Vatican.

Regardless of my position on behalf of the community I serve, the USPS owes it to the citizens and customers they serve to clearly and appropriately inform the public of a potential closing and give weight to the customers' voice as you conduct your studies to "determine customer needs. The legitimacy of the process depends on strong and thorough input from the community and documentation.

Sincerely,



Brian Higgins
Member of Congress